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INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES OF THE CARIBBEAN

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Keynote Address

delivered by **Professor Emeritus Mervyn C. Alleyne**

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of the **Society for Caribbean Linguistics**

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**The University of the West Indies, St. Augustine,
Trinidad & Tobago**

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Abstract: The presentation examines general issues related to the indigenous languages of the Caribbean region, including those which were spoken in the islands but no longer are, and those currently found in Guyane, Suriname, Guyana and Belize. It first discusses the marginalisation of these languages and their speakers and the need to correct the warped social psychological attitudes implied in the designations used to refer to them. The imperative for studying these languages is both scientific and moral. Studies of language structure are urgently needed both to add to the store of scientific knowledge of human culture and cognition and to aid in social development engineered by the peoples themselves. Sample illustrations of interesting structural features are given. The genetic classification of the languages through appropriate historical comparative methodologies is another area which needs to be pursued. In all of this, the peoples themselves must be fully involved not as passive subjects but as leading actors.

I AM VERY GLAD for this opportunity in the twilight of my career—or rather, should I say, in the dark night of my retirement, to be able to see the spotlight perhaps for the last time, and in the country of my birth, my native Trinidad & Tobago; not, in precise geographical terms, the beloved Woodbrook and St. James of my youth, but here in St. Augustine, which has been very accommodating and hospitable, and where I have been made to feel most comfortable. Thanks to Valerie Youssef, Ian Robertson, Barbara Lalla, Hubert Devonish, Jeanette Morris, and Carol Keller for putting it together and making it possible. It is an occasion which I shall cherish, all the more as I see here so many generations of

Caribbean linguists—both those from the Caribbean and those working on Caribbean languages. I am almost tempted to use the Biblical formula, displaying my recently acquired Biblical lore, and to say that Alleyne begat Carrington, and Carrington begat Robertson, and Robertson, Devonish, Lalla, Youssef, Roberts, Kouwenberg and others are doing a whole lot of begetting! And we shall hear from the present generation in the course of the next few days. Indeed one of them will be reading a joint paper¹ on an indigenous language, which is also the subject of my presentation, I having made a casual remark at a conference planning meeting about the need for Caribbean linguistics to fully embrace indigenous languages as its own, and then finding myself entrusted with the task of speaking to that need.

I have asked myself what authority, scientific or moral, do I have for speaking about indigenous languages. Even what interest did I have? It was causing me a great deal of embarrassment, not to mention nervousness and anxiety as I assumed that I knew nothing about the subject and I don't know whether I have the skill, displayed by some persons, of speaking with great assurance and conviction of things I know naught of. My anxiety grew as I pictured myself standing before cynics like Velma, Hubert, and Pauline, who indeed would be wondering, and wondering quite audibly—Since when does he know anything about indigenous languages?—*mutatis mutandis* based on the particular dialect preferences of the individual cynic.

I was engaged in such musings when it suddenly dawned on me that many indigenous languages are spoken by minority peoples and severely marginalised peoples. I have always been interested in marginalised minorities, and marginalised languages and cultures, having grown up myself as a member of one. Mine, of course, was a numerical majority, treated as and behaving as a marginalised minority. Things have changed or are changing. In Jamaica, where I have spent most of my adult life, the numerical majority is seeking to de-marginalise its language and culture. In my native Trinidad, I have become a numerical minority within a complex language and culture situation where all groups claim to be marginalised. Quite fascinating, really!

Indigenous peoples represent a classical straightforward case of numerical minority with marginalised language and culture; the whole point of this presentation is to promote the beginnings of a de-marginalisation process, or rather to strengthen it or make sure it's on the right course, since there are signs that the process has begun in the Anglophone Caribbean/South America, manifested for example in the work of the Indigenous Languages Project of the University of Guyana,² the initiator of which, Prof. Walter Edwards, a very active member of our Society, is here with us at this Conference.

What's in a Name?

I shall begin with first principles: Naming.³ I do not have time, and it would be perhaps too great a digression, to go deeply into why I think and have always thought that naming was an important instrument of cultural expression, beyond that of cultural and psychological domination and control. We in the Caribbean have never fully enjoyed a prerogative to name our ecology. We have reserved the prerogative in private in-group discourse, but have had to yield it in public discourse. This applies to personal names, and in many cases to flora, many of our fruits being named after a perceived resemblance to a temperate climate fruit. It applies to the languages we speak, to who we are, and to where we live. Our languages were named by the colonial classifiers, who were semiotic monopolists. Our languages were generally and generically named *creole* or *patois*. That kind of naming has been partly responsible for many people in the region believing that what they speak is not really a language. I recall that in an early paper which I wrote and published in 1971, I recommended that we should cease to use "creole" or "patois" as proper nouns to refer to these languages. I also had my doubts as to whether they were suitable as generic names, and I suggested the use of the adjective of nationality. I have recently discovered that Richard Allsopp had earlier properly named the popular language of Guiana/Guyana, Guianese/Guyanese.

Then there is the term *indigenous*⁴ itself. It may seem to be quite innocuous, even positive. It seems to avoid some of the more pernicious connotations of *aborigine* or even of *indio*. However, if we look more closely at the concept—interrogate it, in the modern intellectual jargon—we find that the term is not as innocent as it seems. *Indigenous* means denotatively 'first possessors', 'original inhabitants'. But it has the same range of connotations as *native* or *aborigine*. Not all first possessors are referred to as native or aborigine or indigenous. These terms are, in practice, used only in contrast with colonial ruler, new elite, modern, etc., in relation to the Pacific, Australia, New Zealand, Africa and the Americas. Like the use of the terms *indio*, *negro*, *patois*, *criollo*, etc., this naming was a means of simplifying or ignoring the individuality of the peoples who were encountered by (European) explorers, reducing them to one convenient denominator based on an antithesis between the person holding the prerogative of naming and the person or thing to be named: the antithesis of coloniser to colonised, dominant to subdued; of occupying force to native; of evolved, modern to backward, primitive; of French, English, Spanish, Portuguese to creole; of language to patois.

Allow me to digress a little in order to add here that we are witnessing now in Central and South America a re-appropriation of the term *indio*, by the people themselves, as a symbol of identity and struggle. There is also a process, particularly in the Dominican Republic

and to a lesser extent in Puerto Rico, by which *indio*, as a category of phenotype, has been re-appropriated and elevated to the status of a symbol of national identity, to avoid the pejorative polarity of *negro* and to a lesser extent *blanco*, and to express the national ideology of *mestizaje*. The re-appropriation of *indio* in Central and South America signals an important stage in the process of psychological liberation; there are other cases among us where such pejorative designations are, as it were, hurled back defiantly at those who created them: *black* and *nigger* are other examples. It should, however, be noted that it is not only oppressed people who employ this stratagem, since the use of the term *yankee*⁵ by northern Americans of the United States to refer to themselves constitutes another example. And, very interestingly and perhaps somewhat ironically, the word *yankee* is most probably the phonological creation of one indigenous group, from 'English' to 'yenki'. (I would assume that that particular indigenous language did not have [gl] onset clusters.) Once we are sure that we have triumphed over and rejected the connotative pejoration or low hierarchical ordering implied in *native*, *aborigine*, *indigenous*, we may resume using them as signifiers with neutral connotation.

There has been a great deal of uncertainty and confusion in the naming of the so-called indigenous peoples and their languages. Part of the confusion lies in the fact that in many cases, when these peoples were asked, "Who are you?" they simply, quite logically, used the word in their language that meant 'people'. (Picture Christopher Columbus coming ashore in Watling Island or Hispaniola, standing haughtily erect, and asking the welcoming party, Who are you? and this welcoming party, completely bemused by the question, looking at each other, and with a shrug of the shoulder, saying, We are people, and the old Chris diligently writing this name down in his notebook. (A good idea for a cartoon at the next anniversary of the arrival of Columbus!) Other factors are the dialect differences affecting the form of the names and the whimsical recording of such names by the earliest accounts.

Some confusion still exists. For example, *Island Carib* or *Black Carib* is still sometimes used to refer to what is more properly an Arawakan language. Arawakan is a major language family of the islands and the South American mainland.* The term *Island Carib* was used by scholars, presumably to distinguish it from *Continental Carib*. In the term *Black Carib*, 'Black' refers to the phenotype of the present speakers, who are mixtures of Africans and Arawaks. This language is now spoken in Central America, as a result of the deportation of that intractable group of mixed Africans and Caribs from the island of St. Vincent when it became that island's turn to be exploited. So the only extant example of this language of the islands is now to be found in Central America, chiefly in Belize and Honduras, where it is now better known as *Garifuna* or *Garífuna*. The name *Garifuna*, though the language is more properly an

* See Arawakan and Cariban family trees on pages 14 and 15.

Arawakan language, may itself be cognate with Carib, there being a rather well established regular phonological alternation in Arawakan between voiced and voiceless obstruents in initial position. In the toponymy of Trinidad, there is, according to Baksh-Soodeen, "imprecision in the use of velar stop [g]. It is hence not strange to find the gua-cua variation in toponyms: Guare ~ Cuare; Guapo ~ Cuapo." So Island/Black Carib or Garifuna is now rather well established as a member of the Arawakan family, but with heavy lexical loans from the Cariban family, which may render their genealogical affiliation somewhat problematic. I'll return to that later.

The problem of naming reached its most pernicious level in the use of one of the ethnic names of the indigenous peoples to derive the word *cannibal*. The root of this word seems to be based on one of the variant names of the peoples generally known as "Carib," with the addition of the Spanish suffix *-al*, a Spanish suffix used to derive collective nouns. (It was also very productive in the formation of toponyms based on a Cariban/Arawakan root: Atagual, Carapal, Caratal.) In the case of *cannibal*, there may have been some echoing of 'animal', from the Latin *animus* 'having breath' and *-al* 'of the kind'.

This pejorative connotative use reached the highest of levels of literary expression, eventually becoming a much explored trope in Caribbean and international literary, psychological and anti-colonial discourse. Shakespeare, in *The Tempest*, used the name Caliban to create an antithesis to Prospero and to represent or epitomise the so-called primitive in human beings. Shakespeare's Caliban is closer to the original variant forms of the name (further evidence, if such were needed, that Shakespeare was a brilliant researcher), while "cannibal" seems to be a phonological and gross semantic distortion.

It is interesting to observe that Aimé Césaire, in his play *Une Tempête*, recast the whole confrontation between Prospero and Caliban in which Caliban questions Prospero's prerogative to name him, and rejects the name Caliban. Incidentally, Césaire's Prospero offers Caliban a new name—Hannibal (cynically, very close phonetically to *cannibal* and apparently mocking the tendency of Africans in the New World to attempt to rescue their humanity by invoking African heroes of the past of whom Hannibal is one). However, Césaire's Caliban also rejects the name Hannibal in favour of the re-appropriation by himself of the prerogative of naming himself. Caliban decides to call himself X, anticipating the use of the same response by Malcolm in another place and another time. Both Césaire's Caliban and Malcolm show up the dilemma in which New World subject peoples find themselves in believing that they do not possess a language in which to publicly and officially name themselves and their ecology.

Buck has evolved as the term most widely used in Guyana, a generic and, I believe, pejorative term, ignoring as usual the ethnic

individualities of the peoples. As usual, as happened in the case of *nigger* and *coolie*, people who use the term will claim that they mean no offence. And that may very well be the case of people who inherit these terms in their denotative meanings, and only later come to be socialized into the connotative meanings. After all, "nigger" was once merely a phonological variant of *Negro*, which even the most liberal-professing southern whites had obligatorily to use to refer to those who now choose to name themselves African Americans in the long arduous search for a suitable term which would express their re-appropriation of self. *Buck*, probably from Dutch *bok* 'he-goat', was probably first used by the Dutch colonisers of Guiana, and probably is another example of the debasement of these peoples by likening them to animals, as I suggested was the case of "cannibal."

It is true, and a universal of human societies, that individuals are regularly referred to by names of animals (we have a lot of "jackasses," and not only in the political discourse of Trinidad), "chicken," for example, being frequently used in English. If the American Western movies have any historical accuracy, the indigenous peoples of North America often gave themselves animal names, for example, Chief Crazy Horse. Othello was referred to as a "buck" with questionable metaphorical connotation. However, it is altogether another matter when an entire people or peoples are thus designated, with no endearing intention. Similarly, we might observe here that the people of mixed race in the New World were referred to by a derivative of the Spanish word for 'mule', *mulo*, with a pejorative suffix *-ato*, giving *mulato*, based on the malicious belief, in an era which glorified purity, that, as so-called racial hybrids, they could not bear offspring.

Perhaps the most outstanding case of semiotic aberration is the use of "Indian." A gross error made by Columbus has continued to generate a continuing series of absurdities. First of all, the peoples were called generically *indio*,⁶ forever enclosing them in a frame of reference controlled by the sign-making conquistadors and their successors. The *indios* were assigned the colour "red" in response to an obsessive need manifested in the sign-makers to designate people, including themselves, in terms of a socialised perception of colour.⁷ Then when it was realised that they were not Indian, that is, not of the Indian sub-continent, they were called "West Indians." In the meantime, explorers generally referred to Australian indigenous peoples as Indians (later *aborigines* or *abos*). That is, a term misapplied in the Americas becomes re-misapplied in the Pacific in a parody of imperialist discourse. Later, when "real" Indians arrived in the Caribbean from India, they became "East Indians." So now we have East Indians, as a sub-category of West Indians, that is, East Indian West Indians. And I have been told that West Indians themselves are now a sub-category of the newly (foreign) named "Caribbeans".⁸ I suppose that if someone now came to settle in the Caribbean from East India, say

Calcutta, that is, Eastern India, s/he would become an East Indian East Indian West Indian; and if s/he came from Bombay, s/he would be a West Indian East Indian West Indian; and so on. There could even be a North Indian East Indian West Indian.

In the area of language, as well as in other domains of our existence, Caribbean peoples have to become sign-makers and not continue to be like semiotic pawns on a chessboard under the control of the North Atlantic grandmasters. The list of signs needing reform is long. By way of example, I have a few semantic groupings each with some common pejorative connotations needing reform: *indigenous*, *native*, *prehistoric*, and “discovery” of the Americas, constitute one group; *jungle*, *cannibal*, *tribe*, and *naked* belong to another: the connotations here are indecent, wild, savage. These features may be more characteristic of some modern cities than jungles where killing takes place basically in the quest for food and for the protection of territory. In the particular case of *savage*, it originally indicated ‘of the forest’ before it got, especially in English, the denotation of ‘wild, cruel’. (The original meaning of ‘not grown by humans’ remains in French.) In another case, *tribe* now refers chiefly to indigenous groups in the Americas and Africa: the Arawaks or the Tutsi are tribes, but the Irish Catholics and Anglicans, Serbs and Croats are “ethnic groups.” (Latin *tribus*, the etymology of ‘tribe’, was originally based on *tres/tri* ‘three’, and seemed to refer to three constituent groups of the Roman people; its original meaning is still contained in words like *tribute*, *tribune*, and *tribunal*.) And of course *naked* now connotes indecency, immodesty, although for people who live in tropical climates it makes sense to wear as little clothing as possible. *Black*, *mulatto*, and *indio*, comprise another group; and of course *patois*, and *creole*.

Those of us who live in the islands have not been directly confronted with the problem of indigenous languages and peoples, since as a result of one of the most shameful episodes in modern history, these peoples are no longer with us, no one to claim reparations. But it has been and continues to be an intractable problem in North, South and Central America, including the continental Caribbean. I cannot fully interrogate it here, but the basic question is how, under what terms, are the indigenous peoples to participate in national political, social, economic and cultural systems. *Indigenismo* in Hispanic Latin America has struggled to find the correct, just concept, definition and policy, having moved from a policy of genocide to a totally integrationist policy. The most extreme criticism of this policy is that it itself is/was an instrument to destroy—not the physical being this time, but the ethnic identity of these peoples—and integrate them into a homogenous national culture, leaving them their subordinate status and no other alternative but *mestizaje*. The policy has also moved, I am happy to note, to one of acceptance and even validation of ethnic pluralism. In all this—that is, beyond any activity in concept and policy formulation and implementation—there is the natural process

taking place which is influenced both by natural ecological forces, chiefly the ineluctable movement towards modernisation in North Atlantic terms, and by different ideological positions taken by the indigenous peoples themselves.

In all of this, indigenous languages play a significant role. They epitomise both the distinctiveness of these cultures and the so-called backwardness of the so-called *indio*. The surrender of these languages, that is, language shift, is seen as the most important instrument of the "evolution" of the *indio*.

It is interesting to observe that there are distinct parallels in the history of interpretations of creole populations and their languages and the history of policies and attitudes towards them. In both cases, in the creole case and the indigenous case, the languages were seen as impeding the progress of their speakers; and, as I said, the surrender of these languages was seen as the *sine qua non* of progress. It is also interesting to observe that whereas creole languages were/are seen as extraordinarily simple, defective and unsuited for the higher levels of intellectual and scientific activity, the indigenous languages were seen as extraordinarily complex or at least complicated, and similarly unsuitable! An important theme in Caribbean linguistics would be comparative studies of these two situations, including factors which led to creolisation in one case, and to non-creolisation in another. Earlier anthropology, even though it proclaimed the essential equality of language systems, could not altogether escape from approaching these indigenous languages from the categories established for Indo-European languages which had acquired the property of universals, and from presenting both their linguistic and underlying cognitive and cultural structures as "quaint." Current cognitive linguistics would be interested in these languages as exhibiting new dimensions within the parameters of variation of human language, these parameters now having as their default selection always the particular Indo-European example.

Linguistic Studies

After these excursions into Caribbean psychological history, I wish to turn now to the question of the study of these languages. Some work has been done on Cariban, Arawakan, and Mayan languages, and on some others, the full extent of which work I have been unable to assess for this presentation. It would seem that one necessary and useful task would be to conduct an up-to-date ethnolinguistic and sociolinguistic comparative survey of the indigenous languages of the Caribbean, which would mean essentially Belize, Guyana, Guyane and Suriname, and secondarily, I suppose, all the other territories washed by the Caribbean Sea in the broadest definition, that is, including as well the countries of Central

America, and Venezuela, Colombia, and also Brazil.⁹

Indigenous languages exist in a number of different ecologies, each having a particular effect on these languages. The first ecological category is contact with European languages. As a general rule, contact equals death (with no creolisation). Isolation is another category, characterised by a few lexical loans from Spanish or Portuguese or English or Dutch. The indigenous languages falling into this category of isolation are geographically Amazonian languages, isolated deep inside the Amazon forest area. In the third ecological category, are those languages that have their own geographical space, but are in relatively close contact with modernising groups near the coast. Here there is considerable lexical borrowing from Guyanese, Sranan, Belizean, English, Dutch, Spanish, French, Portuguese, as the case may be. A major example of this category is the case of Garifuna, surviving contact in a relatively modernising context and with the inevitable heavy lexical borrowing. The fourth ecological category is the case of individual persons and families who migrate to urban centres; here, there is a generational factor in language contact and shift.

A survey would seem to be vital for national planning programmes. As a matter of fact, all conceivable linguistic studies could be subsumed under the broad rubric of ethno- and sociolinguistic surveys. There are, for example, structural studies, either descriptive, following a standardised format, or else within current theoretical frameworks which would bring out the particular way in which these languages add to our understanding of the range of possibilities of human language structure, and thus ensure the permanent presence of these languages in the records of human culture and cognition. Standardised descriptions are vital in order to document these languages before they die (the Caribbean has been a graveyard for languages and peoples), and to form the basis of literacy and other social development programmes and second language learning programmes, at least for teacher preparation, if not for contrastive analyses of first and second languages. The standardised format is probably the best way to gather information quickly, not to mention effectively in terms of usability. These would be commissioned and would contain guidelines on data collection, including techniques of elicitation which would preserve not only the proper ethical standards but also ensure the integrity and validity of the data.

I cannot resist pointing out that there are some phonological and syntactical structures which may be of special interest to creolists. A [d ~ r ~ l] alternation, for example, *karina* ~ *kalina*, *kaliponam* (recorded by Breton for Island Carib) ~ *garifuna*; an earlier *sh* [ʃ] has become *s* [s]¹⁰ in Lokono (Arawakan); both of these features are well established in Sarawakan, and to a lesser extent in other creole languages. In syntax, there is probably no primary category of adjectives. Morphemes which we may be tempted to call adjectives, based on loose semantic

matching with European languages, take verbal affixes when occurring in predicates. Sentences which are regularly glossed as English statives take the completive affix. For example, in Akawaio and Arekuna (also called Pemon) of the Upper Mazaruni area of Guyana, sentences such as 'he is sick' contain Pronoun + Predicate + completive marker *pee* or *bee*; this marker also occurs in sentences such as 'I am hungry' which also contain Pro + Pred + *pee/bee*, obviously meaning literally 'I have completed a process or an action'. In Lokono, there is *risi* 'rich' (incidentally, obviously a loan word), and *risitu* 'she is rich'; *funa* 'red', *funatu* 'it is red'. A similar distribution of the completive marker is also typical of Mandarin Chinese, and, in my own view, of Saramaccan, and to a lesser extent of other creole languages where the absence of overt marking for perfective distracts us from a proper understanding of the syntax. In both Arawakan and creole languages, the lexical feature [+human] is a constraint on some syntactical operations: passivity in creole language and number in Arawakan.

If anyone wishes to resuscitate the earlier claim that indigenous languages played a role in creole genesis, he/she may be able to move beyond fanciful speculation to the examination of real solid evidence.

Language Families

But it is perhaps the area of genetic relationships which is most challenging. Genetic relationship studies have been falling into rather rough times since their hey-day in the 1960s. We are witnessing a kind of polarisation between attempts, sometimes rather fanciful, to gather the languages of the world into ever-increasing super-families, and, at the other pole, very negative attitudes to comparative linguistics. In the case of Cariban and Arawakan languages, there is a need to sort out genetic relationships from areal relationships and from purely typological relationships. The case of Trinidad exemplifies the challenge. Baksh-Soodeen seems to be claiming that up to five or six different "languages" were spoken at the arrival of Columbus, but linguists do not agree among themselves on the precise genealogies. Douglas Taylor considers Yao (an extinct language of Trinidad) to have been Arawakan though "mixed with Carib words." Other linguists list Yao in the Cariban family.

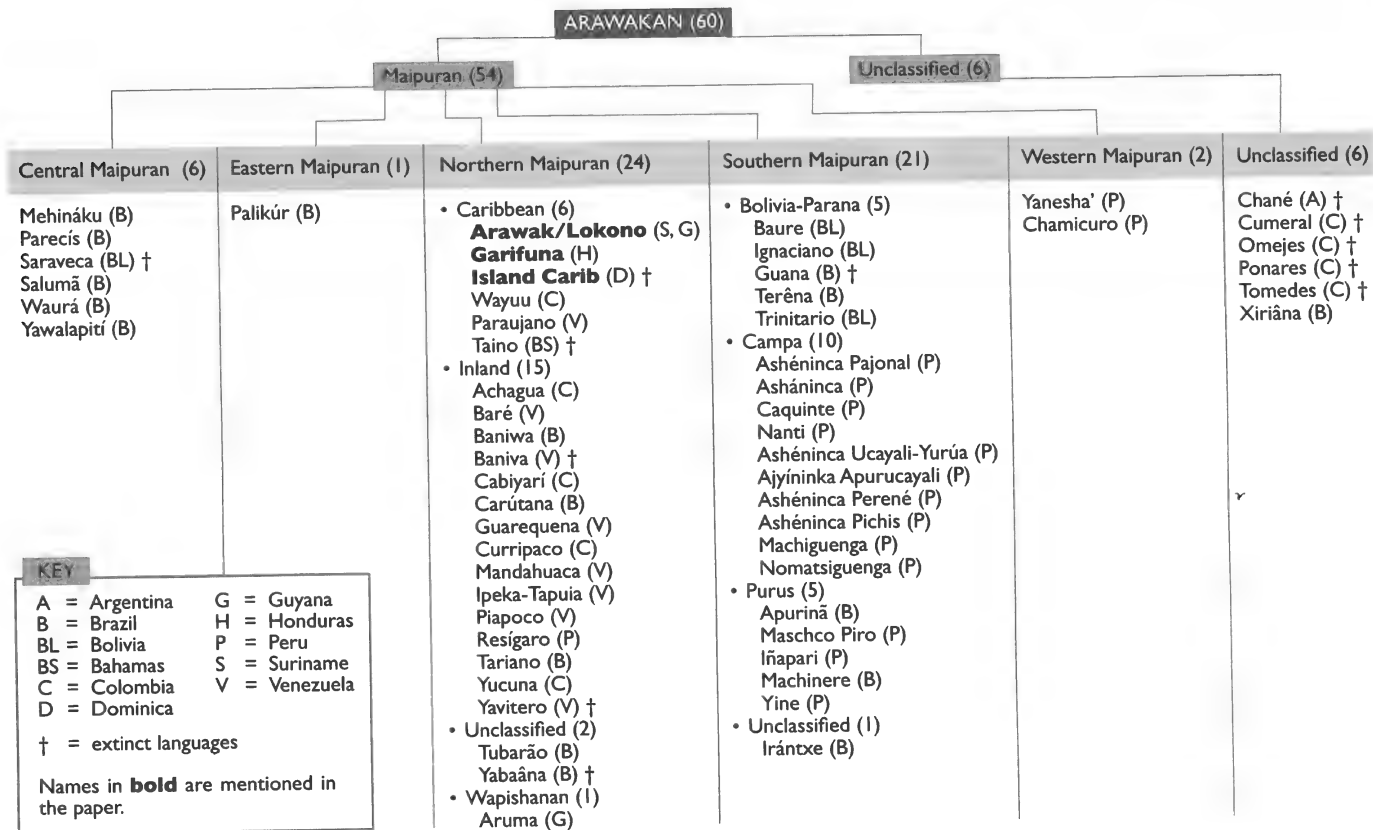
We have a traditional grouping into Arawakan/Cariban and Mayan, but no genetic relationship has been established between the two families; it is tempting to explore the possibility. If there is a relationship, it is quite remote. In all of these studies, I believe that we needn't adhere slavishly to one single methodology and one area of evidence. An eclectic approach is necessary, using first of all techniques to isolate borrowings by looking, for example, at phonological evidence that points to chronological layering of forms. A phonological change is restricted

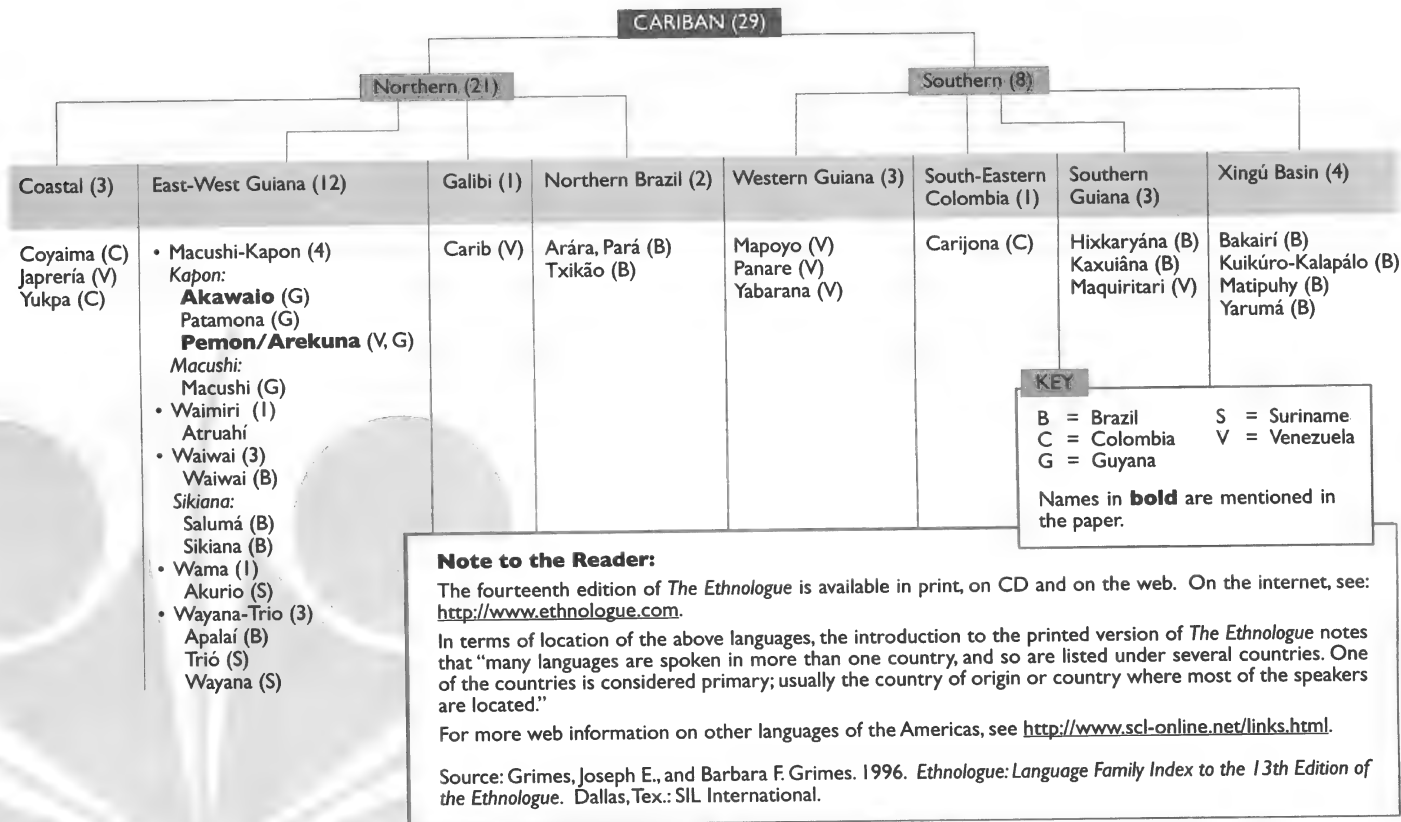
to a particular time period; where a form appears to be an exception to an otherwise regular phonological rule, it may be that the form entered the particular language at a later date, after the phonological change in question had already taken place.

Since these borrowings will reveal systematic phonological correspondences with other languages (i.e., with the lending languages), and thus lead to false genetic assignment, the borrowings must first be identified and withdrawn from the pool of evidence. Systematic phonological correspondences in lexical items confirmed as native will be the major evidence, but I would not rule out morpho-syntactical evidence where a sharing of a grammatical category combines with a similarity in form. Unfortunately, these languages do show cases of the borrowing of syntactical forms. For example, the Carib loan words in Arawakan of the islands are not simply lexical morphemes (not only the well-known male vocabulary), but contain also functional grammatical morphemes: complementisers, prepositions, *because, until, if, that, but*. The Garifuna word order of Noun + Determiner (at least demonstrative determiners, e.g., *hiaru tigura* 'woman that') may also be a loan from Carib. In fact, one may perhaps have to postulate that language mixing, that is, a stage beyond mere borrowing, seems to have taken place. (I mentioned earlier the use of Arawakan suffixes on Carib loan stems.) The whole question of borrowings both from and into these languages may be mentioned here as a continuing important research area, including, of course, the question of toponyms.

Historical comparative studies are not simply esoteric indulgence. Combined with archaeological studies and oral histories, comparative linguistics provides the best available means of revealing the history of these peoples, relative chronologies of their migratory movements, contacts, and death, and the history of social and cultural contacts, allowing us to bury finally and forever that ugly word and concept "pre-historic."

Linguists interested in language and gender are needed to explore that mythologised and still uncertain area of Caribbean history where it is recorded that the Caribs defeated the Arawaks, killed off the Arawak men and kept the women (it is not only now that Caribbean men are an endangered species!). However that may have been, it is well known that there is a stock of lexical items used by males and another used by females. In Island Carib (Arawakan), females also differ from males in the assignment of gender to some nouns, for example, *hati* 'mouth' is feminine for men but masculine for women. But it goes beyond that. In Lokono (Arawakan), one gender form refers exclusively to Arawak males; the other to everyone and everything else, that is, including women and even human males who are not Lokono or Arawak.





Ethical Questions

In all our work, I would stress one overriding need: we need an applied focus, with a partnership between linguist and community, not a divorce and separation. This may seem idealistic or unrealistic, but it should mean a serious purposeful campaign to train persons to study their own languages. This was a contentious issue in the early period of creole linguistics. It has largely been corrected, with many Caribbean linguists being, or at least claiming to be, native speakers of creole languages. It, however, surfaced again recently in the debate on Haitian. There may be some doubt about the scientific validity of the claim that only native speakers are able to penetrate some of the deeper semantic and syntactical subtleties of their language. But I would think that in the case of the indigenous languages, relatively distant as they are from the Indo-European language structures to which we have become accustomed, native speakers will be essential not only as "informants," but also as "scientists." To quote Chomsky,

the best way to investigate languages is to teach their respective native speakers linguistics, and then have them work on their own languages. Native Americans working on their own languages have discovered all kinds of things that none of the anthropological linguists ever noticed because these facts are just too subtle and you really have to have the complete mastery of the languages in order to study them seriously.

As we know from bitter experience, the question of the integrity and validity of creole data always surfaces even with the work of those Caribbean-born linguists claiming to be native speakers.

In exploring this partnership between linguist and community, I wish to cite a remark by Honda and O'Neil taken from a manuscript which Michel DeGraff was kind enough to send me:

the scientific investigation of a given language is responsible to the larger human community which its results could affect. What matters is eventual success, and that will be measured by the extent to which work on the language is integrated in a meaningful way into the life of the community of people who speak it.

And there is more from Hale:

It makes extremely good sense to engage school-age children in the study of their own language—it is perhaps one of the very best ways of enabling them to become familiar with certain basic principles of scientific inquiry. It has the advantage over other sciences in that the school-age child comes prepared with an extremely large body of data (in the form of intuitions about the sentences of his/her language).

Since primary data are so readily available, they provide an excellent opportunity for teachers to engage their students in the process of making observations about language, which are similar in nature to the kinds of observations that any scientist makes in relation to the phenomena he/she studies.... Skills which are developed and exercises in making and reporting linguistic observations are of a kind which can be of great use to students in many phases of their lives, both academic and non-academic.... The questions that arise in linguistic theory represent a reasonable way to induce in students the wish to know answers to some of their innate scientific questions, and thus to introduce them to scientific research... to allow them to overcome their fear of the scientific style.

It is not too late to apply this strategy to creole communities. We should prepare ourselves to apply it to the indigenous communities.

In this partnership between linguist and community, I am pleased to see that there are already movements in this direction being undertaken by Ian Robertson and Hubert Devonish, who have just led a team of researchers to Guyana to work on Arawak(an) and than whom there are probably no better persons to carry out this mission and of whom we expected no less. Needless to say, the University of Guyana should be fully involved.

It would be our moral responsibility to ensure that indigenous languages do not suffer the same fate as creole languages. Even though in post-colonial discourse we may make the psychological triumph and free ourselves from any type of connotative prejudice associated with the antithetical relationship of "indigenous" and "native" to "modern" or "civilised," it will still be very useful to carry out investigations into what may be the appropriate names, taking into account what the speakers themselves, by the exercise of their own free prerogative, wish to call themselves and their languages.

Are we going to develop/display colonial relations with indigenous peoples and their languages? The "we"—"they" dichotomy? We have attacked and made considerable inroads into one of the grand narratives of imperialism that is centred on the notion of hierarchy in civilisations and cultures (whether language, race, phenotype, religion, music) and that proposes the value of a single language in nation-building and the disappearance of indigenous and "backward" languages, either by natural selection or by conscious policy. Some creole languages have survived the plantation and the cultural and economic hegemony of industrial and mercantilist capitalism, which proclaimed the inexorability of decreolisation. Whether they can survive contemporary globalisation is another matter. More vigorous efforts may be needed. And indigenous languages may be in greater jeopardy; their fate may even be in some way pegged to the fate of creole languages. Not, I am afraid, a very happy prospect for them.

Thank you again for this opportunity to be among you.

NOTES

1. Devonish, Hubert, and Enita Castillo. 2002. The predicate system of Garifuna. Paper presented at the 14th biennial conference of the Society for Caribbean Linguistics, The University of the West Indies, St. Augustine.
2. SSILA in the USA (Society for the Study of the Indigenous Languages of the Americas <<http://www.ssila.org>>), SIL International (<<http://www.sil.org>>), and CELIA-CNRS in France (Centre d'Etudes de Langues Indigènes d'Amérique <<http://www.vjf.cnrs.fr/celia/Fr/Celia.htm>>) are other organisations dedicated to the study of indigenous languages of the Americas. The IRD (Institut de Recherche pour le Développement, France) in Cayenne is also active in this area (<<http://www.cayenne.ird.fr/>>). See the SCL website for links to other organisations of interest.
3. See also Peter Roberts' *Oral to Literate Culture: Colonial Experience in the English West Indies* (Kingston: UWI Press, 2002) for a discussion on naming and being named in the West Indies.
4. The word *indigenous* is based on the Latin *indigena* 'a native' from *indi-* 'in' + *gignere* 'beget'. The ultimate source is the Indo-European root **gen-*, meaning 'birth, type, source, origin, produce'. **Gen* is also the root of *generation*, *genesis*, *gentry*, and appears as *gn-* in *pregnant* and *benign*, and *gon-* in *gonad*. In Germanic languages, **gen-* appears in *kin*, *king*, and *kind*.
5. Yankee is also thought to have originated in *Janke*, Dutch for Johnny.
6. Modern Portuguese distinguishes between *indio/a* 'Amerindian' and *indiano/a* 'Indian'.
7. For a fuller examination of this issue, see Mervyn C. Alleyne, *The Construction and Representation of Race and Ethnicity in the Caribbean and the World* (Kingston: UWI Press, 2002).
8. Anglophone West Indians resident in the Caribbean never refer to themselves as "Caribbeans." As a proper noun, the word *Caribbean* is reserved for the geographic region of the Caribbean. As an adjective, it is used for both people and things Caribbean.
9. The largest number of living Cariban and Arawakan languages today are to be found in Brazil, at least twelve (12) and seventeen (17), respectively.
10. These phonetic symbols of the International Phonetic Alphabet have the following values: the sound represented by [ʃ] (the voiceless postalveolar sibilant) is found as the first sound in *ship*, and the sound represented by [s] (the voiceless alveolar sibilant) is found as the first sound in *sip*. See <<http://www2.arts.gla.ac.uk/IPA/index.html>>, the official website of the International Phonetic Association.

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